

SERMON

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Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bartlett, Illinois

Lent 5, A- March 22, 2026

Ezekiel 37:1-14 Romans 8:1-11 John 11:17-27, 38-53

Sometimes in spite of trying our best,

- it is easy to become deeply discouraged.

It can come from what's happening in our personal lives--

- maybe a dream crashing to pieces around us,

- and then we feel disillusioned,

- disappointed in someone or something we deeply believed in,

- even in ourselves.

- Sometimes it is when a sin has been involves--

- eating away at our

- self respect and integrity--

- and who we have wanted to be.

- And often the resulting feeling that we

- seem to have been abandoned by God.

When our life is in shambles,

- it can be just plain overwhelming

- for the strongest of people.

It's as though we have worked long and hard at a table

- putting together a beautiful picture on a jigsaw puzzle,
- and suddenly someone walking by bumps the table,
- and it all goes to pieces sliding to the floor.

An example is someone who has suddenly and unfairly

- lost a job they have had for years
- and treasured as part of our identity.

Even faithful Christians are not exempt from deep disappointments.

In fact, they can sometimes become discouraged from observing

- what's happening in the Church itself--
- in a lack of commitment of others,
- or disappointing attendance,
- or individuals who behave in personally offensive ways

Those who remain faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus

- can have feelings at least somewhat similar to
- those first disciples who loved and followed Him
- and then had to watch Him being rejected
- and mocked
- and nailed to a cross.

But **WHATEVER** is discouraging to US

- likely pales in comparison

- to the discouragement described in today's readings....

Ezekiel was called to be a spokesman for God

- at a time of total and absolute devastation--

- during the exile of God's chosen people

- in Babylon from 587 to 539 B. C. --

- almost fifty years.

It was a time when it seemed to many that

- ALL of God's most important promises had been broken,

- and His sacred covenant with His people forgotten.

Jerusalem, the holy city and government center, was in ruins--

- including, unthinkably, the sacred Temple itself,

- the very sign of God's presence.

In being taken into exile,

- the people had been uprooted from their homes,

- ripped away from all that was familiar to them.

- and forced to travel as captives in chains--

- some with chains in their noses--

- to a foreign land,

- along with their king,

Recall that the King was successor to King David.

- He was assumed to have God's special promises

- guarding his reign--

- on the throne that was to last forever..

So more than all that physical trauma,

- their very souls

- seemed to be having their life crushed out of them.

How could they still think of themselves God's special people?

That was an underlying question

- which itself was so hurtful

- that it was almost un-askable.

If their nation had died,

- **must it not be true that their God had died too?....**

Their Lord God had a different view.

- He led Ezekiel in a vision to a field covered with dry bones

- and had him walk among them in every direction.

Could there possibly be any hope in all that devastation?

Could there possibly be any life at all left

- in the midst of all those fleshless bones?

Amazingly, the answer is "YES!"

- YES when the Lord's prophet speaks a life-giving Word

- and the Lord sends forth His life-giving Spirit.

- Then the very dry bones are covered with flesh and restored to life.

And the Lord reveals the vision's meaning to the prophet.

- The "bones" are the house of Israel.

The complete devastation they were enduring

- was NOT beyond their God's ability to overturn--

NO MATTER HOW PAINFULLY HOPELESS

- THEIR PLIGHT SEEMED FROM A HUMAN VIEWPOINT.

- He would be the God who keeps His promises--

- in His own time,

- His own way,

- and in a way more loving and profound,

- more wonderful and glorious

- than human minds could conceive as possible.....

- an answer that included the salvation of the whole world

- coming from His chosen people....

The Gospel for today also focuses on life in the midst of death

- and hope in the midst of darkest sorrow

- AND victory in the midst of DEEPEST DISCOURAGEMENT--

- there at the CLOSED DARK TOMB OF LAZARUS.

The sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha,

- had wanted Jesus to come to help when Lazarus had fallen ill.
- But when Jesus FINALLY arrived--
- from NOT very far away--
- Lazarus had been in the grave FOUR days.

Mary and Martha were devastated

- not only filled with grief,
- but also with bitter DISAPPOINTMENT that their friend Jesus,
- who had healed so many,
- had not come in time to keep Lazarus from dying.....
- “Lord, if you had been here...!”

And, in the shortest verse of Scripture we read of Jesus own deep hurt,

“JESUS WEPT.”

Likely not only for Lazarus,

- but for the whole world’s having to undergo
- this horrible reality of death
- as the wages of sin.

But now the vision of the prophet Ezekiel is brought to reality,

- and life is brought to the DEAD.

Into the valley of the shadow of death comes

- THE Prophet, the fulfillment of all the prophets,

- God's Word made flesh,
- anointed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

"Lazarus, come out!"

Jesus said... And Lazarus DID come out!

Ironically, as our service folder notes,

- it is the raising of Lazarus to LIFE
- that set in motion the plans being made for Jesus' own DEATH.

The chief priests and Pharisees called a meeting.

- And in that hour of deep darkness,
- in the verses immediately following today's Gospel ,
- we read that Caiaphas said,

"It is expedient that one man should die for the people"--

That is, he knew that if the Romans would fear that an uprising

- was building
- by the increasing numbers of Jesus' followers,
- the Roman army would carry out
- a slaughter of the people in Jerusalem and beyond.

"It is expedient that one man should die for the people."

Caiaphas meant one thing; God meant another.

- Caiaphas had not spoken these words of his own accord.

- Here in the midst of the councils of DEATH
- God was at work bringing the promise of LIFE--
- FOR ALL THE WORLD!

And here we are at the Cross-- at the very center of our faith.

- We have a God who can and does turn evil into good--
- a God for whom no situation is beyond redeeming
- and no person is so dead physically,
- spiritually or emotionally
- that true hope is gone.....
- And He would rise from the dead....

The very same Jesus Christ is here for us today--

- here to assure us that there is much MORE to be seen
- than meets our human eyes
- here to bring light and joy back
- to our own all-too-often
- DEADENED spirits.

The very same Jesus who wept for His dear friend Lazarus cares also for us-- deeply.

He has called His first disciples and also us His FRIENDS.

He continues to be what He was called

- when He walked this earth in the flesh,

“The Friend of Sinners.”

In His own words,

- greater love has no one than this,

- than he lay down his life for his friends.

As the immediate cause of His death

- was the giving of life to Lazarus,

- so He gives His life that we may live.

And that life is stronger than the power of sin or death itself to destroy us.

In the words of today’s epistle,

“There is therefore NO condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit has set you free in Christ from the law of sin **and death....**”

The Spirit of God dwells in YOU!... If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.”

“I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?”,

Jesus asked Martha.

“Yes, Lord,”

- she said,

- with eyes that must have been gleaming with hope and faith and love.....

“Yes, Lord; I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world!”

Faith, in the darkness.

“THEN Jesus... came to the tomb.”....

The most significant events of Jesus’ life took place in darkness--

- His Birth,
- His arrest,
- His death,
- His resurrection.

He can use our own times of darkness

- to bring us into a much higher level of spiritual life.

It is then that we often learn what it means truly to trust--

- when nothing makes sense,
- and faith is the only thing left to which we cling.

Not faith in faith, but true faith--

- with Himself as its content....

Our Lord Jesus is gazing at you and me today,

- long and lovingly.

He wants us all to know that with Him

- there is always more to life,
- more than what WE control--

- things seen only by faith that trusts Him and His Word...
- Jesus, Lord of Life, is here among us sinners NOW--
- as OUR Friend--
- just as He has promised--
- here with His own loving surprises
- with their bright new life FOR YOU!

And NOTHING is hopeless in His eyes.

The peace of God, which FAR surpasses our human understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus-- for life everlasting.
Amen.